

BROMLEY ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.00 pm on 10 January 2012

Present:

Councillor Peter Morgan (Chairman)
Adrian Hollands, SE London Chamber of Commerce (Vice-Chairman)
Robert Cundy, Federation of Small Businesses
Robert Goddard, Thackray Williams Solicitors LLP
Marc Hume, LBB Renewal & Recreation
David Keogh, Jobcentre Plus
Colin Maclean, Community Links Bromley
Howard Oldstein, The Glades
Martin Pinnell, LBB Renewal & Recreation
Dene Stuart, NewsQuest

Also Present:

Louisa Allen, LBB Renewal and Recreation
Carol Arnfield, Bromley Adult Education College
Paul Le Blond, Biggin Hill Airport
Mike Gibson, SoutheasternTrains
Amanda Grice, Jobcentre Plus
Phillip Lapper, Baxter Philips
Mike Lewis, Michael Rogers
Jenny Whyte, LBB Environmental Services

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Chris Bannister (Rizon Jet), Bek Bekir (National Apprenticeships Service), Jeff East (Acorn Commercial), Mary Manuel (LBB Head of Planning Strategy and Projects), Sam Parrett (Bromley College), Liz McNaughton (Trevall Engineering) and Councillor Sarah Phillips (Chairman, Renewal and Recreation PDS Committee).

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 OCTOBER AND MATTERS ARISING

Martin Pinnell reported that the Council had been in contact with White Label (who had organised the Invest Bromley event in September 2011), and it should be possible to pull together an event to promote office/industrial property in Bromley. He would be pulling together a small team within the Council and involving partners.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18th October 2011 be agreed.

3 UPDATES ON MAIN PARTNERSHIP THEMES:

Members of the Partnership gave updates on progress across the main themes of the Partnership.

A) TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT

Marc Hume reported on progress across the town centre development sites. He stated that although there was plenty of vision, what was needed, and what he thought Bromley had, was a sense of momentum and confidence to meet the challenge from Croydon and elsewhere.

Site A: Bromley North. Lord Justice Binning's judgement on 20th December 2012 quashed Policy OSA and directed the Council to review the policy. This was an opportunity to develop a business case and lobby for a DLR extension in the run-up to the mayoral election in May. It was agreed by the Partnership that this should be a major economic development priority for the borough.

Site B: Tweedy Road. Work was being carried out to test the viability of using the site as a temporary car park – TfL would only support the proposal with sound traffic modelling data. The Chairman added that a variable message system for town centre parking was due to be installed later in the year.

Site C: Town Hall. The exclusivity agreement with the Land Group/Cathedral had been extended for up to six months.

Site E: The Pavilion. The £5m investment programme was on target, and work should be finished in the next few months.

Site F: Civic Centre. Refurbishment of the North Block should be completed by April, allowing the Joseph Lancaster and Anne Springman blocks to be emptied.

Site G: West of the High Street. Officers would be meeting with potential developers in the next 4-6 weeks to obtain their views, modify the scheme as necessary and then move on to securing a development partner. The scheme would still be retail-led, and a document would be circulated later in the month, including to members of the partnership. Work was also being carried out to investigate the possibilities for refurbishing the Churchill Theatre/Central Library in conjunction with this site.

Site J: Bromley South. Officers were discussing with Network Rail whether a more long-term redevelopment above the station would be possible following the withdrawal of the previous developers.

Site K: Westmoreland Car Park. The planning application was due to go to Development Control Committee on 3rd April 2012.

Site L: Former DHSS Building. Trillium Real had indicated that they would be submitting an application for a hotel/residential scheme. The policy requirement for the site was replacement office space.

Site M: Queen's Gardens. A full planning application for five restaurants had been submitted by Capital Shopping Centres in December 2011; this was due to be considered by Development Control Committee on 14th February 2012. The application was controversial because of the impact on the gardens.

Bromley North Village. Funding of £3m had been allocated by TfL, subject to the Council meeting certain design requirements, and the Council would be contributing £1.5m. The majority of the comments received during the public consultation had been positive. Officers were also in discussion with Sainsbury's about their options for expansion.

Orpington Town Centre. Officers were in discussion with the new owners, Miller Properties, about the possibilities for development, particularly on the former DHSS site.

B) TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS SUPPORT

Martin Pinnell, the Head of Town Centre Management and Business Support, gave an update across the main Partnership themes of Town Centre Management and Business Support in Quarter 3, 2011/12. In particular, he outlined the projects funded through the Outer London Partnership bid –

- Support for independent businesses – a series of workshops were being arranged – details would be available later in the week;
- Installation of graphics to empty shop-fronts;
- Extension of public realm design and upgrade to the central part of Bromley high Street;
- A revised heritage trail for Bromley;
- “Are You Bromley?” themed arts/cultural events;
- Support for the Orpington Business Improvement District (BID) proposal – a specialist agency had been engaged and a ballot on the proposal was expected in September/October 2012. The Chairman hoped that this could lead to BIDs for Bromley and Beckenham, and Howard Oldstein commented that he was focussing on ensuring that the Glades and the rest of the town centre co-operated on opening hours.

C) OUTER LONDON FUND

The Head of Town Centre Management and Business Support provided an update on bids to the second round of the Outer London Fund, submitted on 14th November 2011 – the outcome was expected by the end of the month. The proposals, which needed to have a greater emphasis towards capital spending, included extending the street scene upgrade in Bromley along the High Street towards Bromley South, guiding people to use the open spaces in

Bromley town centre, upgrading shopfronts in Bromley and Penge, and public realm improvements in Beckenham.

D) UPDATE ON CORE STRATEGY PROGRESS AND TIMESCALES

The Partnership received an update on Bromley's Core Strategy. Issues of particular importance for the Partnership included the need to protect and promote employment land and the focus on business areas at Biggin Hill.

E) CRYSTAL PALACE PARK PROJECT

Louisa Allen, Community Development Manager, gave an update on the Crystal Palace Park Project. The Executive had set up a development board involving a number of stakeholders, which would meet for the first time on 13th February. A not-for-profit trust was seen as the most effective means of securing sustainable investment for the park.

The Chairman invited members of the Partnership to let the Council know of any ideas for the Park.

4 PARTNER UPDATES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR JOINT WORKING

Members of the Partnership gave an update on a range of activities undertaken since the last meeting.

A) UNEMPLOYMENT AND EMPLOYMENT TRENDS IN THE BOROUGH

Dave Keogh and Amanda Grice of Jobcentre Plus provided an update on unemployment and employment trends in the Borough, tabling figures as at the end of November 2011. The number of claimants for each vacancy was 6.8 in Bromley, as opposed to 6.3 across London and 4.7 nationally. Claimants in Bromley were being urged to look further afield for work in surrounding boroughs, Docklands and opportunities related to the Olympics. There had been a marginal increase in people on Job Seekers Allowance to 5,927, (3% of the working age population). The London figure was 4.4%, the national figure was 3.8%.

About 1,500 of these were young people between the ages of 18 and 24. The Government was investing £1bn in a national programme, the Youth Contract, to support this age group. They would be interviewed on a weekly basis, and there would be increased opportunities for work experience. Colin Maclean asked whether the voluntary sector could be involved in work experience placements as employers: this would be checked. Anyone interested in providing work experience was urged to contact Amanda Grice.

B) BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT DEVELOPMENTS

Paul Le Blond provided an update on developments at London Biggin Hill Airport following its identification as a Strategic Outer London Development Centre in the London Plan, and in particular the LoCATE (London Centre for Aviation Technology and Enterprise) project. Since the last meeting, there had been a number of one to one and larger meetings, including a full stakeholder meeting on 1st December 2012 at the new RizonJet facility at the Airport. Stakeholders had also been shown the new heritage hangar where five Spitfires were being restored and maintained, visited Jet Aviation and saw the potential of the West Camp.

The first six LoCATE apprentices had been identified – they would have eight months of training at Cotswold Airport starting in August, then move to Biggin Hill for a further sixteen months.

The LoCATE Team were undertaking a survey of the economic value of the Airport to the local economic community, the results of which would be fed in to Bromley's Core Strategy. There was already evidence of the global connectivity offered by the Airport – 747 locations around the world were connected by flights to or from the Airport in 2010, about three times more than the scheduled flights offered by all London's other airports.

He concluded by stating that the LoCATE Team was keen to participate in development of the Core Strategy for the area and to get more positive stories about the Airport into the local press. He also invited the Partnership to hold one of its meetings at the Airport.

C) UPDATE ON LOCAL COMMERCIAL PROPERTY MARKET

Jeff East of Acorn was not able to attend the meeting, but had sent in some comments. He reported that 2011 had been better than 2010 for his business, although the same challenges continued to affect the market. Funding was in short supply, with cash more important and loan to value ratios greatly reduced. There was strong interest in commercial property investments. The summer was expected to be fairly quiet with the Olympics and the usual holiday period.

Mike Lewis confirmed that although market conditions were tough, there was still some activity. The availability rate for offices in Bromley had recently dropped to about 5% (having been 10% in recent years.) He felt that there was a lack of good quality modern office space in Bromley, with nothing available for letting having been built since 1989, and the market was therefore fairly stale. It was suggested that part of the reason for this was a lack of infrastructure and poor transport links at Bromley North and this was echoed by Philip Lapper. Marc Hume commented that with TfL identifying that the Jubilee Line between London Bridge and Canary Wharf was nearing capacity, there was a strong case for providing direct links to Canary Wharf. There already existed the potential to market the Bromley South area as an important cluster for banking/finance/insurance.

The Chairman also raised the issue of developing high tech/business park provision at Biggin Hill. Transport links were critical for this type of activity, and accommodation needed to be high quality.

D) THE GLADES RETAIL PERFORMANCE

Howard Oldstein reported on trading conditions at the Glades in the run-up to Christmas and in the New Year. The Glades had tried to engage more with the High Street, and there had been footfall gains on 24th November with the lights switch-on. Trading had otherwise been poor in late November, but had increased leading up to the holidays, with the best Christmas trading for five years. He felt that the Council's free parking on Thursdays initiative had been successful and should be repeated, and that the Glades should not attempt to match competitors by staying open to 9pm. He felt that the position was stable overall – although some national retailers had been lost, the occupancy rate was still at 96%. His 3-5 year plan was to establish larger units to match what was available at Bluewater.

E) IMPROVEMENTS AT BROMLEY SOUTH STATION AND OTHER PLANNED RAIL/STATION IMPROVEMENTS IN THE BOROUGH

Mike Gibson gave an update on proposed rail improvements in the Borough. There were now about 80 additional services with more services stopping at Lewisham for the DLR. Passenger numbers were holding up well following decreases in 2009 as the banking crisis hit, but it was noticeable that there had been a move from annual to monthly season tickets. All Southeastern stations in the borough would be refurbished during the current contract (which ran to 2014) and Bromley South was receiving a £41m upgrade including lifts, a new booking hall, refurbished toilets and re-painting. This would be completed by May/June 2012. At Orpington Station, Network Rail was considering a new parking deck for 160 cars to meet demand. There were no immediate plans to re-instate direct services to London from Bromley North, but consultation with stakeholders on the new franchise would be an opportunity to lobby for improvements.

F) GENERAL NEWS ROUND

Dene Stuart (NewsQuest) appealed for stories for their weekly business newsletter.

Colin Maclean (Community Links Bromley) reported that he was building relationships in his new role, and was helping RBS Insurance with employee volunteering and the Glades with their 21 good deeds 21st birthday initiative. He also inquired about how the voluntary sector could be involved with the Olympic torch relay – the contact at the Council for the Olympics was John Gledhill.

Robert Goddard (Thackray Williams Solicitors) reported that although residential conveyancing was fairly strong, companies were reducing their discretionary spend.

Carol Arnfield (Bromley Adult Education College) reported that they were doing a lot of work with Jobcentre Plus with an increased range of courses including literacy, numeracy, budgeting, pod-casting and touch-typing. A staff member now attended the job centre every Tuesday morning. The College had also applied to run a job-club at Kentwood.

Robert Cundy (Federation of Small Businesses) reported that insolvencies were up for the third or fourth quarter running. Overall, Bromley was doing well in the current climate, but some other areas such as Kingston/Richmond and central London were doing better. The Federation was looking to hold another business expo, probably in May, but they needed to find a larger venue than Oakley House. Marc Hume suggested that they consider the Civic Centre.

5 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Chairman stated that although the next meeting was due to be at 4.00pm on Tuesday 24th April 2012, it was likely that this would need to change – a new date would be circulated as soon as possible.

(The date for the next meeting was subsequently confirmed as 4pm on Thursday 19th April 2012.)

The Meeting ended at 5.58 pm

Chairman